

Patterns of Nation-States and Culture in the Atlantic World

Part 1c

The Haitian Revolution



Conditions for the Haitian Revolution

- French Saint-Domingue
 - One of the richest European colonies
 - Wealth based on plantations → sugar, indigo, coffee, cotton
- Produced nearly half of the world's sugar and coffee
 - The livelihood of one million out of twenty-five million people in the Kingdom of France in 1789 depended directly upon the imports of coffee, indigo and sugar from Saint-Domingue
 - Several million indirectly depended upon trade from France's richest colony to maintain their standard of living
- Had originally been a Spanish possession
 - Taken by the French in the mid-17th century
 - Established a colony on the western part of the island
- French settlers enjoyed protectionism for splendid profits from their slave plantations



A map of the island of Hispaniola, showing the historical division between Saint-Domingue (left) and Santo Domingo (right). A black line represents the boundary established in 1776, starting from the north coast, curving inland, and then following the coast down to the south. The area to the left of the line is labeled 'Saint Domingue' and the area to the right is labeled 'Santo Domingo'. Both areas are associated with the years '1697 - 1795'. The text 'Grenzfestlegung 1776 →' is located at the bottom left, with an arrow pointing to the boundary line.

**Saint
Domingue**

1697 – 1795

Santo Domingo

1697 – 1795

Grenzfestlegung 1776 →

Conditions for the Haitian Revolution

- The importation of slaves was vital in order to sustain the sugar production in the unhealthy climate of the Caribbean
 - 1787 → French imported about 20,000 slaves from Africa into Saint-Domingue
- Death rate from malaria and yellow fever → at least 50% of slaves imported from Africa died within a year of arriving
 - Masters tended to work their slaves as hard as possible while providing them with the bare minimum of food and shelter → were probably going to die anyway

Conditions for the Haitian Revolution

- White planters knew they were outnumbered by slaves by a factor of more than 10:1
 - Second half of the 1700s → 30,000 white settlers; 28,000 mulattoes (holding about 1/3 of the slaves), and about 500,000 black plantation and household slaves
- Masters lived in constant fear of slave rebellion
 - Extensively used the threat of physical violence to maintain control → limit possibility of rebellion
 - Whipping, rape were common; castration or burning was used after repeated violations
- Louis XIV passed the Code Noir in 1685
 - Attempt to regulate such violence, treatment of enslaved in general in the colony
 - Masters openly and consistently broke the code

Conditions for the Haitian Revolution

- 1758 → white landowners began passing legislation restricting the rights of other groups of people
 - Rigid caste system was defined
- Most historians have classified the people of the era into the three groups
 - White colonists (*blancs*)
 - Free blacks (*gens de couleur libres*)
 - African born slaves

Conditions for the Haitian Revolution

- *Blancs*
 - Generally subdivided
 - Plantation owners
 - Lower class of whites who often served as overseers or day laborers
- Free blacks
 - Usually mixed race → known as mulattoes or *gens de couleur libres*
 - Tended to be educated and literate
 - Often served in the army or as administrators on plantations
 - Many were children of white planters and enslaved mothers while others had purchased their freedom from their owners
 - Often received education nor artisan training
 - Sometimes inherited freedom or property from their fathers
 - Some *gens de couleur* even operated their own plantations and were slave owners

Conditions for the Haitian Revolution

- African-born slaves
 - Outnumbered the other groups by 10:1
 - High rate of mortality → continually imported new slaves
 - Kept their culture more African and separate from other people on the island
 - Separated new slaves from Africa from creoles (slaves born in the colony), who often had more prestigious roles on plantations, more opportunities for emancipation
 - Had no rights under the law

Conditions for the Haitian Revolution

- White colonists and black slaves frequently came into violent conflict
 - "Whites, mulattos and blacks loathed each other. The poor whites couldn't stand the rich whites, the rich whites despised the poor whites, the middle class whites were jealous of the aristocratic whites, the whites born in France looked down upon the locally born whites, mulattoes envied the whites, despised the blacks and were despised by the whites; free Negroes brutalized those who were still slaves, Haitian born blacks regarded those from Africa as savages. Everyone-quite rightly-lived in terror of everyone else...Haiti was hell, but Haiti was rich". - Paul Fregosi

Conditions for the Haitian Revolution

- 26 August, 1789 → publication of the Declaration of the Rights of Man by the National Assembly in France
 - Declared all men free and equal
- French Revolution shaped the course of the conflict in Saint-Domingue
 - Initially widely welcomed on the island
 - Wealthy whites → an opportunity to gain independence from France
 - African population → mostly allied with royalists, the British as they understood that if Saint-Domingue's independence were to be led by white slave masters, it would probably mean even harsher treatment

Conditions for the Haitian Revolution

- Saint-Domingue's free people of color had been actively appealing for full civil equality with whites since the 1780s
 - Used the French Revolution to make this the major colonial issue before the National Assembly of France
- October, 1790 → Vingt Ogé, a wealthy free man of color from the colony, demanded the right to vote
 - Convinced that a law passed by the French Constituent Assembly gave full civil rights to wealthy men of color
- Colonial governor refused → Ogé led a brief rebellion in the area around the colonial capital of Cap Français

Conditions for the French Revolution

- Led an army of around three hundred free blacks
- Captured early in 1791
 - Executed by being “broken on the wheel” before being beheaded
- Ogé had not fought against slavery → his treatment was cited by later slave rebels as one of the factors in their decision to rise up in August, 1791
- Conflict up to this point was between factions of whites, and between whites and free blacks
 - Enslaved blacks watched from the sidelines

Revolt of the Slaves

- After the failure of Ogé's uprising, resentment continued to simmer among the mulattoes in the south, black slaves in the north
- May, 1791 → French revolutionary National Constituent Assembly granted citizenship to wealthy free people of color
 - White settler Provincial Assembly refused any concessions
 - Within two months isolated fighting broke out between former slaves and the white

Revolt of the Slaves

- August 22, 1791 → slaves of Saint-Domingue rose in revolt
 - Leaders of the slaves → overseers, coachmen, or managers on plantations
 - Began to kill their masters and plunged the colony into civil war
- Within the next ten days, slaves had taken control of the entire Northern Province of Saint-Domingue in an unprecedented slave revolt
 - White kept control of only a few isolated, fortified camps

Revolt of the Slaves

- Slaves sought revenge on their masters through “pillage, rape, torture, mutilation, and death” (Cessner and Hunt)
 - Long years of oppression by slave masters → left many blacks with a hatred of all whites
- Revolt was marked by extreme violence right from the very start
 - Masters dragged from their beds to be killed
 - Heads of French children placed on spikes that were carried at the front of the rebel columns

Revolt of the Slaves

- Plantation owners had long feared such a revolt → well armed and prepared to defend themselves
- Within weeks, the number of slaves who joined the revolt reached approximately 100,000
 - Encompassed entire northern and southern provinces of the colony
- Within two months after the beginning of the rebellion, the slaves:
 - Killed 4,000 whites
 - Burned/destroyed 200 sugar plantations
 - Destroyed at least 1,200 coffee plantations, hundreds of indigo plantations
- Property/agricultural losses at this point were estimated at two million francs

Revolt of the Slaves

- September, 1791 → surviving whites organized themselves and struck back
 - Killed about 15,000 blacks
- Rebels did not demand independence from France at this point
 - Most of the rebel leaders claimed to be fighting for the King of France → allegedly had issued a decree that had freed all the slaves

Revolt of the Slaves

- By 1792, slave rebels controlled a third of the island
 - Success of the slave rebellion caused newly elected Legislative Assembly in France to address the situation
- March, 1792 → Assembly granted civil and political rights to free men of color in the colonies
 - Shocked countries throughout Europe, the United States
 - Assembly was determined to stop the revolt → feared economic impact
 - Also dispatched 6,000 French soldiers to the island
 - New governor was an ardent supporter of the French Revolution; had hostile relations with planters → saw them as royalists

Revolt of the Slaves

- 1793 → France declared war on Great Britain
 - White planters on Saint-Domingue made agreements with Great Britain to declare British sovereignty over the colony → believed they would maintain slavery
- British Prime Minister believed that success of the slave revolt would inspire revolts in British Caribbean colonies
 - Also believed that taking the richest of the French colonies would be a useful bargaining chip at the end of the war
 - Actually ended in a complete debacle that cost millions of pounds and thousands upon thousands of military casualties

Revolt of the Slaves

- Spain → controlled the rest of the island of Hispaniola
 - Joined the fight with Great Britain against France
- Spanish forces invaded Saint-Domingue
 - Joined by the slave forces
- British and Spanish forces supplied rebels with food, ammunition, arms, medicine, naval support, military advisors
- August, 1793 → only 3,500 French soldiers on the island

Revolt of the Slaves

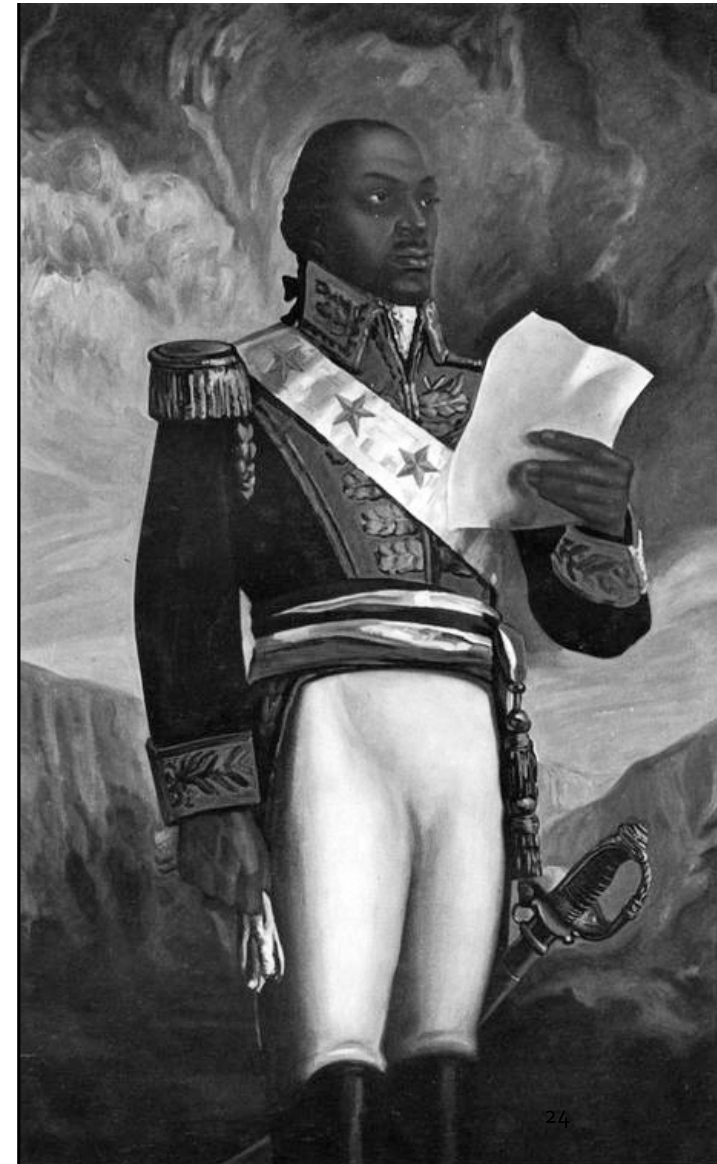
- February 4, 1794 → National Convention abolished slavery by law in France and all its colonies
 - Granted civil and political rights to all black men in the colonies
- French revolutionary government welcomed abolition with idealism and optimism
 - Viewed their actions as an example of liberty for other countries
 - Also served as a moral triumph of France over England
 - Did not allow for independence of Saint-Domingue
- Failed to rally the black military leaders who had allied themselves with the Spanish

Revolt of the Slaves

- Spain and Britain looked like inevitable victors
 - Emancipation declaration appeared to have been too little, too late
- However, Britain was stalled largely because of the impact of tropical diseases
 - Yellow fever killed approximately 12,000 British soldiers in 1794
- French position on the island began to improve

Revolt of the Slaves

- May, 1794 → François-Dominique Toussaint Louverture decided that the tide was turning
 - Suddenly turned against the Spanish and joined the French
 - Ambushed his former allies as they emerged from attending Mass on May 6, 1794
- Toussaint joined the French with his 4,000 troops
 - French numbers had dwindled to a few thousand



Revolt of the Slaves

- Toussaint was a former slave
 - Had obtained his freedom in the 1770s
- Briefly leased a coffee farm with a number of slaves
 - Financial difficulties led to his return to his former owner's plantation as a coachman
- Allied himself with the mulatto faction of the rebellion in the south
- Central figure in transforming the rebellion into a full-fledged revolution
- Toussaint proved to be forgiving of the whites
 - Insisted that he fought merely to assert the rights of the slaves as free black French citizens
 - Did not want independence from France
 - Urged surviving whites, including former slaves masters, to stay and work with him in rebuilding Saint-Domingue

Nation-State Building

- During the violent events of 1791-1794, many plantation owners had fled the colony
 - Former slaves carved out plots for themselves on deserted plantations → grew subsistence crops for their families
- Toussaint remained committed to the plantation system
 - Seen as necessary to supply revenues for his state-building ambitions
 - Dispatched his officers to the countryside to force former slaves to resume production → moderate success

Nation-State Building

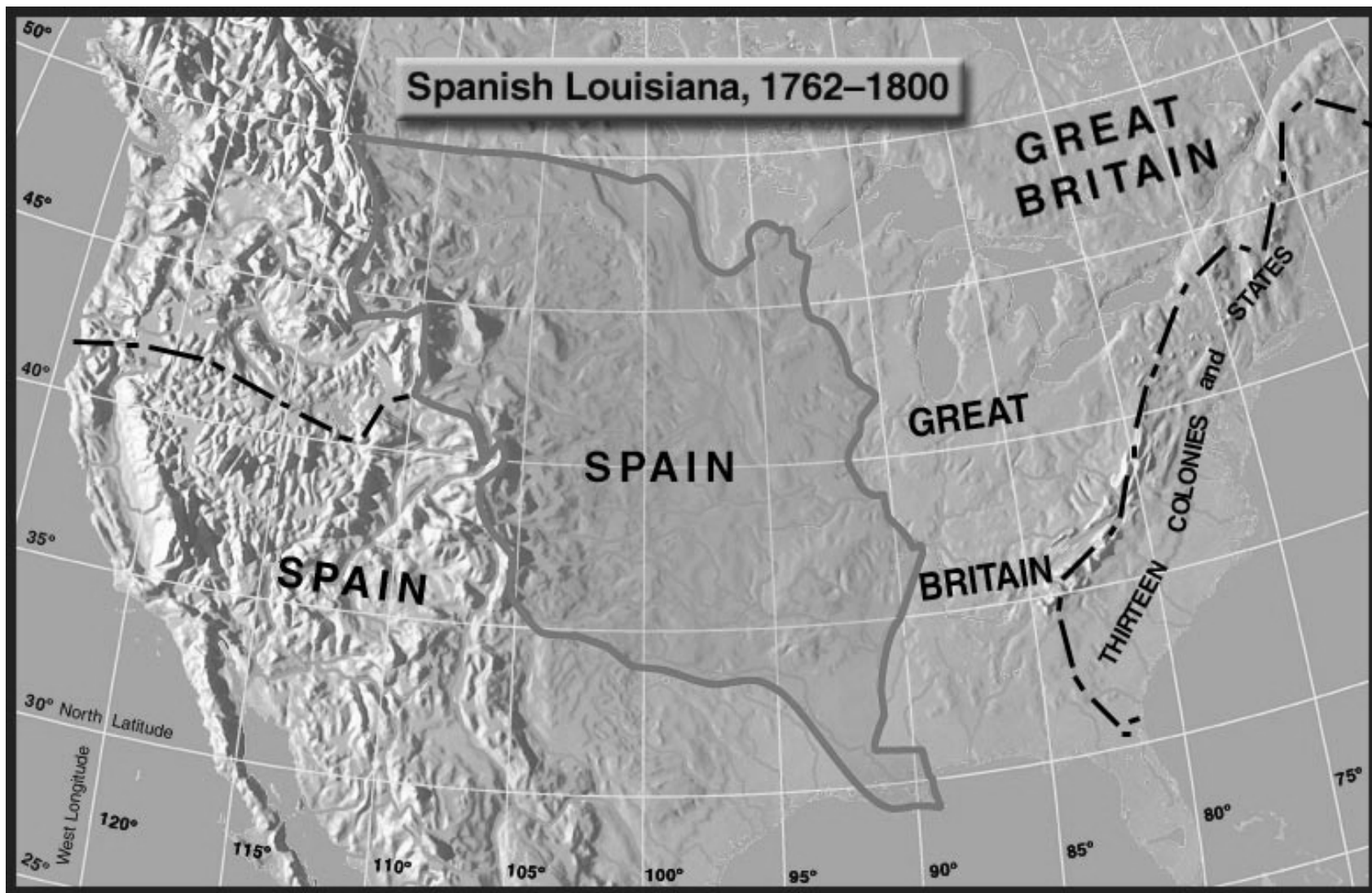
- May 10, 1798 → Commander of the British forces Colonel Thomas Maitland met with Toussaint to agree to an armistice
 - May 18 → British had left Port-au-Prince → devastating to British morale
- May 31, 1798 → Colonel Maitland and Toussaint signed an agreement
 - In exchange for pulling out of all of Saint-Domingue, Toussaint promised not to support any slave revolts in Jamaica
- By March, 1800, Toussaint ruled Saint-Domingue as its dictator
 - Maintained that he was still loyal to France

Nation-State Building

- 1801 → Toussaint was sufficiently powerful to assume the governorship of Saint-Domingue from French officials
 - Proclaimed a constitution that incorporated the basic principles of French constitutional nationalism
- Constitution decreed that:
 - Toussaint would be governor-for life
 - Called for black autonomy and a sovereign black state
- Civil administration was reasonably functional again
 - Efforts were under way to build local courts, schools to broaden the revolution

Nation-State Building

- Napoléon Bonaparte
 - In control of France since 1799
 - Determined to rebuild the French overseas empire
 - Successful in purchasing Louisiana from Spain in 1800
 - 1802 → defeated Austria; able to get Great Britain to recognize the French Republic and make peace
- Dispatched a large expeditionary force of French soldiers and warships to the island
 - Led by Bonaparte's brother-in-law, Charles Leclerc
 - Under secret instructions to restore slavery, at least in formerly Spanish-held part of the island



Nation-State Building

- Bonaparte ordered that Toussaint was to be treated with respect until French forces were established
 - Then to be summoned to Le Cap and arrested
- If Toussaint failed to show, Leclerc was to wage “a war to the death” with no mercy
 - All of Toussaint’s followers were to be shot when captured
 - Slavery would ultimately be restored
- French arrived on February 2, 1802 at Le Cap
 - Toussaint was well prepared for the invasion but when the French arrived, several of his officers surrendered without a fight

Nation-State Building

- Toussaint failed to appear at Le Cap when instructed and was declared an outlaw on February 17, 1802
- Toussaint outlined his plans for defeating the French to his compatriot, Jean-Jacques Dessalines:
 - "Do not forget, while waiting for the rainy season which will rid us of our foes, that we have no other resource than destruction and fire. Bear in mind that the soil bathed with our sweat must not furnish our enemies with the smallest sustenance. Tear up the roads with shot; throw corpses and horses into all the foundations, burn and annihilate everything in order that those who have come to reduce us to slavery may have before their eyes the image of the hell which they deserve". (James Perry)

Nation-State Building

- Dessalines never received the letter – had already taken the field
 - Burned down his wife's hometown of Leogane and ordered the deaths of all French within
 - "Men, women and children, indeed all the whites who came into his hands, he massacred. And forbidding burial, he left stacks of corpses rotting in the sun to strike terror into the French detachments as they toiled behind his flying columns". (C.L.R. James)
- April 25, 1802 → Haitian General Henri Christophe defected to the French with much of the Haitian Army

Nation-State Building

- Toussaint was promised his freedom if he agreed to integrate his remaining troops into the French army → agreed to this on May 6, 1802
- Under the terms of surrender, Leclerc gave his solemn word that:
 - Slavery would not be restored in Saint-Domingue
 - Blacks could be officers in the French Army
 - Allowed the Haitian Army to be integrated into the French Army
 - Gave Toussaint a plantation
- Toussaint was later deceived, seized by the French and shipped to France in June, 1802
 - Died in prison on April 7, 1803

Nation-State Building

- June, 1802 → Dessalines switched allegiance and abandoned Toussaint, going over to the French
 - Rewarded by being made the governor of Saint-Marc → ruled with great cruelty
- Surrender of Christophe, Toussaint and Dessalines did not mean the end of Haitian resistance
 - Guerrilla warfare by Haitian troops continued throughout the countryside
 - French staged mass executions via firing squads, hanging, drowning

Nation-State Building

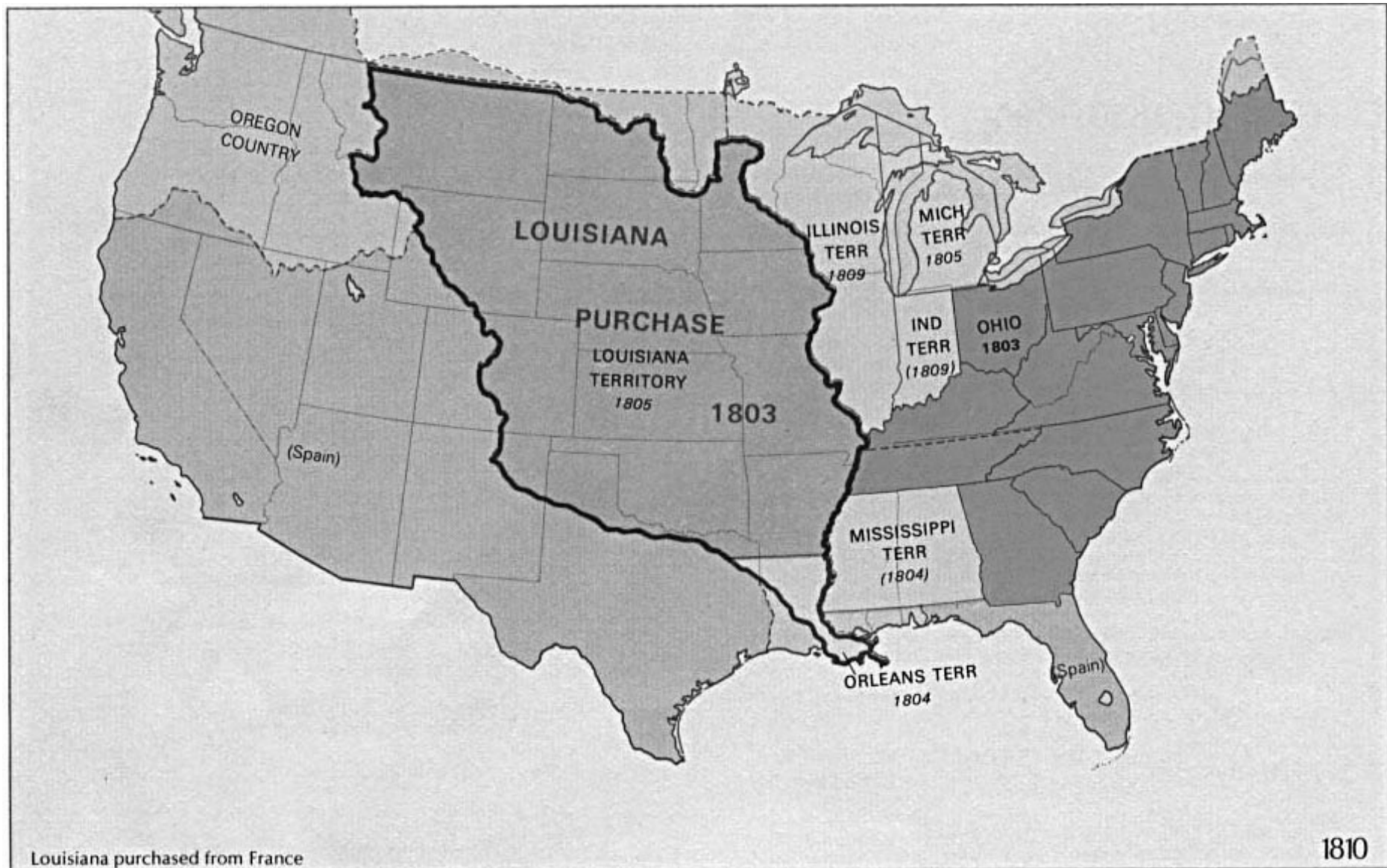
- For a few months, island was quiet under Napoleonic rule
- Became apparent that the French intended to re-establish slavery
→ black cultivators revolted in summer of 1802
 - By the middle of July, 1802, the French lost about 10,000 soldiers to yellow fever → only about 8,000 soldiers left
- October, 1802 → Christophe and Dessalines switched sides again and fought against the French
 - Christophe massacred several hundred Polish soldiers after his defection
 - When he heard about this massacre, a dying Leclerc ordered the arrest of all of the black colonial troops in Le Cap → executed 1,000 of them by tying sacks of flour to their necks and pushing them off the sides of ships
- Leclerc was replaced by Vicomte de Rochambeau → brutal

Nation-State Building

- Rochambeau imported 15,000 attack dogs → trained to savage blacks, mulattoes
- Le Cap → Rochambeau hanged 500 blacks
 - Dessalines replied by killing 500 white and sticking their heads on spikes all around le Cap
- Rochambeau's atrocities helped rally many former French loyalists to the rebel cause
- Many on both sides had come to see the war as a race war where no mercy was to be given
 - Haitians seen as just as brutal as the French – burned French prisoners alive, cut them up with axes, tied them to a board and sawed them in two

Nation-State Building

- Napoléon realized that his Atlantic dream was unrealizable
 - More than 2/3 of the French forces in Caribbean were dead by the summer of 1802
- Sold Louisiana to the United States in April, 1803
 - United States paid \$11,500,000 and cancelled French debts worth \$3,500,000
 - Total of about \$250 million in 2016 dollars
- Napoléon was also growing more concerned about France's European enemies
 - Withdrew a majority of the French forces in Saint-Domingue to counter possible invasion of a weakened France by Prussia, Britain, Spain

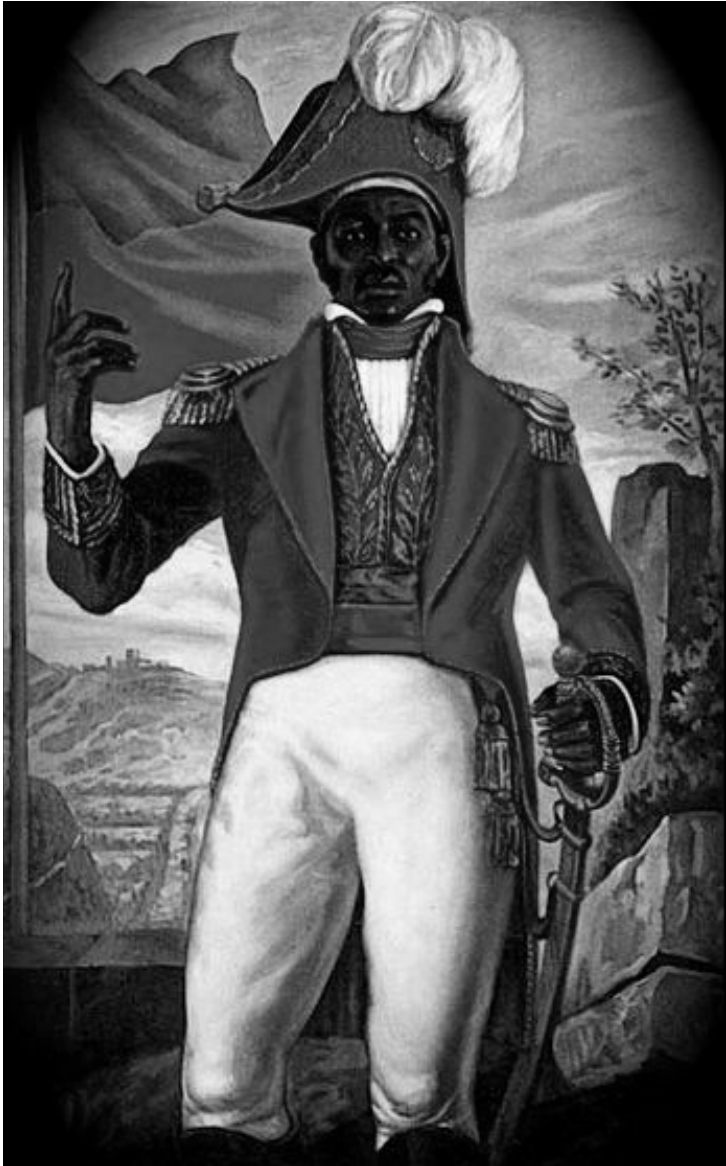


Nation-State Building

- Napoléon could not send requested massive reinforcements
 - British blockaded Saint-Domingue to cut off French forces from reinforcements, supplies
- The French abandoned Port-au-Prince → decided to move to Le Cap
- Dessalines marched into Port-au-Prince
 - Welcomed as a hero by the 100 whites who had chosen to stay behind
 - Dessalines thanked them all for their kindness and belief in racial equality
 - Said that the French had treated him as less than human when he was a slave
 - To avenge his mistreatment, he promptly had the 100 whites hanged

Nation-State Building

- November 16, 1803 → Dessalines began attacking the French outside of Le Cap
- Battle of Vertieres on November 18, 1803 near Cap-Haïtien
 - Last battle on land of the Haitian Revolution
- Dessalines led the rebellion until its completion, when the French forces were finally defeated by the end of 1803



Nation-State Building

- January 1, 1804 → Dessalines officially declared the former colony's independence
 - Renamed it Haiti, its supposed original Taino name
 - Marked the end of colonialism on the island

Nation-State Building

- Independence of Haiti was a major blow to France and its colonial empire
 - French state took several decades to recognize the loss of the colony
- As the French retreated, Haiti was impoverished as its economy was in ruins after the revolution
 - The country descended into anarchy → blacks and mulattoes now fought each other for control
 - Haitians had lost approximately 200,000 people between 1791 and 1803

Nation-State Building

- January 1, 1804 → Dessalines declared Haiti a free republic in the name of the Haitian people
 - Ordered the massacre of the remaining white population after promising them his protection
- January – April, 1804 → resulted in the deaths of 3-5,000 men, women, children
 - Included whites who had been friendly and sympathetic to the black population
 - Women were spared if they agreed to marry non-white men

Nation-State Building

- Only three categories of white people, except foreigners, were selected as exceptions and spared
 - Polish soldiers who deserted from the French army
 - Small community of German colonists invited to the north-west region before the revolution
 - Group of medical doctors and professionals
- Dessalines did not try to hide the massacre from the world
 - Referred to it as an act of national authority
 - Elimination of the white Haitians as an act of political necessity → threat to peace between black and colored Haitians
 - A necessary act of vengeance

Nation-State Building

- Country had to be rebuilt
- Dessalines adopted economic organization of serfdom
 - Proclaimed that every citizen would belong to one of two categories → laborer or soldier
 - Proclaimed the mastery of the state over the individual → ordered that all laborers would be bound to a plantation

Nation-State Building

- Wanted to avoid the appearance of slavery
 - Abolished the ultimate symbol of slavery, the whip
 - Workday was shortened by a third
- Chief motivator was production
 - Dessalines granted much freedom to the plantations' overseers
 - Banned from using the whip → overseers used thick vines to encourage workers
- Dessalines effectively sent the Haitian people back into slavery
 - Succeeded in rebuilding much of the countryside, raising production levels

Nation-State Building

- Dessalines expanded and maintained a significant military force
 - During his reign, nearly 10% of able-bodied men were in active service
 - Ordered the construction of massive fortifications throughout the island
- October 8, 1804 → Dessalines is crowned Emperor Jacques I of Haiti
- May 20, 1805 – Haiti's first constitution is ratified
 - Constitution proclaims all Haitians "black" to strengthen national unity, bring together the country's various factions
 - Legitimizes Dessalines' regime
 - Reaffirms the permanent abolition of slavery
 - Declares that all Haitians are free and equal
 - Emphasizes all Haitians' inalienable right to land ownership

Nation-State Building

- Disaffected members of Dessalines administration began a conspiracy to overthrow the Emperor
- Dessalines was assassinated north of the capital city on October 17, 1806
 - The mob desecrated and disfigured his remains, which were later abandoned
 - Resistance to providing him with a proper burial

Nation-State Building

- 1807 → Haiti was divided into two parts
 - Kingdom of Haiti in the north led by General Henri Christophe → autocratically ruled black north with a state-run plantation economy
 - Republic of Haiti in the south directed by Alexandre Pétion → more democratic mulatto south with privatized economy of small farms
- Land could not be privately owned
 - Reverted to the State
 - No French whites could own land
- Remaining French settlers were forced to leave the island
 - Those who refused were killed
- Haitian State owned up to 90% of the land
 - Other 10% was leased in 5-year intervals

Nation-State Building

- 1821 → reunification of the two parts of Haiti under President Jean-Pierre Boyer
- Boyer passed the Code Rural → aimed at reviving the agricultural economy to produce commodity crops
 - Denied peasant laborers the right to leave the land, enter towns, or start farms or shops of their own



Nation-State Building

- Haiti was the first independent nation in Latin America
 - First post-colonial independent black-led nation in the world
 - Only nation whose independence was gained as part of a successful slave rebellion
- Never again such a large-scale slave rebellion
- Napoléon reversed French abolition of slavery in law, constitution, and practice
 - Reinstated slavery in the French colonies in 1801, which lasted until 1848
- Textbook's assertion that Haitian Revolution most fully realized Enlightenment principles of liberty, equality and fraternity is perfectly debatable